Practice of Intercultural Education through Interaction with Pal Schools Abroad at a Junior High School

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Abstract

The Intercultural Education Project has been established with the aim of both developing the students' English communication skills, and motivating the students to learn English through use of the information technology network.

To this end, we have developed three projects: an E-mail exchange with a partner school in the UK for all graders, a Web discussion link with a partner school in Australia for 8th graders, and a "Japanese Culture" exchange project with contacts in America for 9th graders.

With all these projects we have aimed to educate students about cultural difference between Japan and other countries, and to use the language they have learned from English Text books in instances of actual communication.

We feel this project has been greatly successful, both from a point of view of increasing students' motivation to learn English, and educating them on cultural difference.

1 Introduction
Our school has established the Intercultural Education Project utilizing the information technology network in order to develop the students' communication competence in English. I would like to stir up the students' motivation to learn English and realize the necessity of learning English as a means of communication, through some international communication activities such as e-mail exchange, web discussion and homepage building with pal schools abroad.

2 Goals of the Intercultural Education Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Goals of the Intercultural Education Project</th>
<th>Ways to Interact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>(A) To notice the difference in culture through exchange of information</td>
<td>(for all graders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>(B) To understand the difference of culture through discussion.</td>
<td>(D) To have the attitude to admit the difference and respect one another.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>(C) To send some information on Japanese culture through introduction of culture.</td>
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3 Examples of Activities through E-Link Project (by the British Council)

(1) Partner school wall display (2) Recipe exchange (3) T-shirt designs (4) Trading cards (5) How do they live? (6) International art exhibition (7) Make music together (8) Make comics, manga together (9) Surveys / Opinions polls (10) The View From My Window (11) Other Activities

4 Examples of Practices
A "Daily Lives" Project—Utilizing E-Link Project (by the British Council)

<7th graders —Utilizing (A)(D)(E)(G), 3(5) in the year of 2001>

(1) Goals of "Daily Lives" Project

The students will motivate themselves to notice the difference of culture between Japan and England and motivate themselves to understand cultural differences.

(2) Allotment of "Daily Lives" Project (total 10 hours)

New Horizon English Textbook 7th grade, Unit8

The students will motivate themselves to:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learn English by keeping each key pal abroad for each student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Express themselves concerning daily lives according to the content of the textbook.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Send some questions on daily lives to each key pal in England through e-mail to find some information on the difference between daily lives of the two countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Understand the replies from each key pal and draw a picture and write some sentences on the differences in daily lives between Japan and England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Try to build a homepage based on the activities 4 and send some information to each key pal in England.</td>
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(3) Examples on "Daily Lives" Project

(a) Self expression by the average student A

I get up at seven.
I eat breakfast at seven fifteen.
I come to school by bike.
I eat lunch at twelve forty.
My school is over at 4:30.
I play the trumpet after school.
I go to bed at ten thirty.
...

(b) E-mail to B, A's key pal in UK

Dear B,
Thank you for your mail. It will soon be New Year. I want to imagine your life and then draw a picture, but first I have some questions.
1) What time do you get up?
2) What do you do after school every day?
3) What color is your uniform?
4) What subject do you like?
...

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(c) Reply from B

Dear A,
How are you? I have taken some questions from my e-mail friends and I have answered them.
1) I wake up at 6:45 in the morning.
2) After school I go around my friends' house, we dance to lots of '••••.

(5) Evaluation on "Daily Lives" Project

(a) The Result of the Students' Self Evaluation

Question: What do you think of interaction with the pal school in England?
(1) More interesting than usual classes.
(2) More useful than usual classes.
(3) Gained understanding of cultural differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
<th>Yes, much</th>
<th>Yes, a little</th>
<th>No difference</th>
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(b) Comments

- I was glad to read my key pal's e-mail saying "Thank you for your lovely picture. It was great." or "I really enjoyed your picture on the web."
- I would like to continue keeping interaction with the pal school in England.
- The content from my key pal was a little hard to understand for me, but this kind of interaction activity is very interesting.
- I'm sorry that I didn't get replies from my key pal.
(b) Comments on "Daily Lives" Project from the Teacher at the Pal School

We have found the email link with Shisei Junior High School a wonderful way of extending the knowledge and understanding that our pupils have of distant cultures.

It has been a valuable experience to the teachers involved too who have found the scrutiny of spelling; punctuation and grammar have helped contribute to the literacy standards within the school. The Information Technology skills of the students have also improved albeit in a small way. We hope to continue the links with the continued support of our Japanese friends. There were no real difficulties because we were able to communicate very quickly with our Japanese friends if there were any aspects of the contact that we were not sure about.

The coordinator at Rainham School for Girls would recommend the e-pals scheme to all school as a way of bringing the outside world into the classroom and it gives the students a unique and individual source of knowledge of the Japanese way of life.

(c) Positive Outcomes

- Each student was able to motivate himself or herself to learn English without any relation to the differences of academic abilities.
- The students were able to join these interactive activities positively because they utilized their self-expression, which I dealt with.
- They were able to notice the existence of cultural differences between Japan and England through some information from the students of the same generation in the world.
- The ALT from England took the part of a coordinator of this project.

(d) Points for Improvement

- The students didn't have enough time of preparation for e-mail exchange and they were short of computer literacy.
- The time lag of school curriculum between the two countries made this project difficult.

B "Web discussion: School Life" Project
<8th graders…utilizing 2 (B)(D)(F) in the year of 2001>

(1) Goals of “Web discussion: School Life” Project
The students will motivate themselves to understand the differences of culture between Japan and Australia through discussion.

(2) Allotment of “Web discussion: School Life” Project (total 6hours)
N.H.T.B 8th grade, Unit4

The students will motivate themselves to:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Be able to express their ideas and opinions according to the contents of the textbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have their opinions on school life and explain the reason in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Join the discussion through the bulletin board provided by the pal school of Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Understand cultural differences through web discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) Class Activities and the Contents of Discussion Board
…the student C (average level)

Hi, I’m C. School life is interesting because I can talk about card games with my friends. In Japan school begins in April and ends in March. When does your school begin and end?

↓

(From an Australian student) To C. In Australia the school year begins at the end of January and ends in December. What season is it in Japan?

↓

(From C) Hi, D. Thank you for your reply. In Japan, it is summer now.

(4) Evaluation of “Web discussion: School Life” Project
(a) The students’ Self Evaluation and Some Comments
Self Evaluation

“What do you think of interaction with the pal school in Australia?”

(1) More interesting than usual classes.
(2) More useful than usual classes.
(3) Gained understanding of cultural differences.

Comments

- I enjoyed communication with the students in Australia.
- I am glad to have replies to my opinions from Australia.

Positive Outcomes

(a) The students enjoyed exchanging information more easily and handily than e-mail exchange.

(b) They had confidence in using English through the process where by the English sentences come into the computer screen at once.

Points for Improvement

(a) Both schools need some pass words to maintain the security.

(b) The Australian students didn’t show any interest in the topic we proposed.

“Japanese Culture” Project

<9th graders…utilizing 2 (C)(D)(E)(G) in the year 2000>

(1) Goals of “Japanese Culture” Project

The students will motivate themselves to improve their understanding on cultural differences.

(2) Allotments of “Japanese Culture” Project (total 15 hours)

N.H. E.T 9th grade Unit2～Unit3
The students will motivate themselves to:

1. Understand the contents of the textbook and learn how to use the present perfect tense and infinitive usage.
2. Choose the topic they are interested in and make some sentences to introduce Japanese culture to the world using in English.
3. Complete their homepage with combining a picture they draw.
4. Send e-mail attaching the file of Japanese culture to their key pal in America.

(3) Examples of the contents of interaction and the works of the student A (high level)

E-mail to D's key-pal:

Dear F (to an American key-pal),

Hi, How’s it going? Thank you for your e-mail. I like Japanese pop music, and my favorite band is “TM revolution”. It is one of Japanese popular groups.

New Year’s Day is coming soon. Many Japanese people usually go to a shrine to pray for good health and good luck. I go to shire, too. But my family drinks special sake “Otos” before it. I got many new years cards for my friends. We eat New Year’s special dishes called “Osechi”. Usually we spend the time with our family or people who we love. How do you spend New Year’s Day? …

P.S. I’ve attached a file of Japanese culture, Yukata, casual Japanese kimono.
5 Evaluation of The Intercultural Education Project

(1) Self Evaluation by the students

Question: What motivate you to learn English? (multiple choice) out of 90 students

A When I was able to communicate with a foreigner in English.
B When I was able to understand English.
C When I was able to write English.
D When I was able to understand English grammar points.
E When I was able to grasp the outline of some paragraphs in English.
F When I was able to grasp the outline of English conversation by listening.
G When I was able to read aloud the English textbook.
H When I expressed myself in English.
I When I joined some interactive activities with some people abroad (highest scores)
J When I learned and understood cultural differences.
K When I got good marks in the English tests.
M When the English teachers encouraged me or praised me.
N When I learned English through English music or movies.
O When I learned English through Internet.
P Other cases.
(2) Evaluation by the ALT of our school
---I think Shisei Junior High School students have learned not only how to use email with foreigners, but also their computing skills have improved steadily as well as their ability to express themselves in English to a real English speaking/reading audience. It really is a wonderful example of bringing a different culture into the classroom through the use of modern technologies.

(3) Positive Outcomes
(a) The students were able to motivate themselves through interaction with some pal schools abroad.
(b) They improved their practical communication competence such as ability for self-expression and reading through interactive activities according to the curriculum of the textbook.

(4) Points of Improvement
(a) We need more efforts to overcome some difficulties of continuous interaction with one another such as the differences of time lag and curriculum.
(b) We need more time to discuss the topic for interactive activities.